John Mytton

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John Mytton

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A. Edward Newton

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By Way of Explanation

The following little sketch of John Mytton is an extract from a paper on English Color Plate Books that I read before The Print Club of Philadelphia about a year ago.

The event came about in this way: two ladies, light blue stockinged women, in a manner of speaking, asked me to prepare and deliver this paper. They were charming women, or I would none of them: moreover, one was the wife of the Chief Justice of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, and the other, the wife of a Superior Court Judge. Now, in these days when traffic rules and regulations change every hour, one spends a good deal of his time before a Chief Justice, and, as the fines imposed by a Chief Justice are subject to review by a Judge of the Superior Court, I thought it well to accede to their request. Everyone is aware that there are not enough

lawyers to go round, and that it is almost an impossibility to get a lawyer to go square: hence it is my invariable custom to throw myself on the mercy of the Judge. At such times it is always well to have a friend at Court—preferably two friends: hence this paper.

By nature a sedentary man, Color Plate Books changed the whole course of my life. I have become a sportsman, an authority on horse-flesh; I breed dogs and ride to hounds. I learned to swear, roundly, with Jack Mytton, not difficult; and to drink, deeply, with Jack Jorrocks, who claims, with some reason, that drinking will soon become a lost art. My friend Mr. Frank Raby was by my side when we stood with bowed heads at the grave of Mr. Mytton. "Take him for all in all we shall not look upon his like again."

A. Edward Newton
"Oak Knoll"
Daylesford, Pennsylvania

November 15, 1924

UPB

John Mytton

One of the most desirable of English Sporting Books is the first edition of "The Life of Mytton." It is a small volume, originally published in 1835 and should be bound in brown cloth, and contain twelve plates by Alken. Another edition appeared two years later, containing nine of the original twelve plates, and nine new ones, and on account of the difficulty of obtaining the first edition, booksellers frequently refer to the second edition as most desirable because of the larger number of plates, whereas the fact is that the first edition while almost unobtainable, is greatly to be preferred.

John Mytton traced his family back for five hundred years; so much for that. His father died when he was a lad, and his mother's efforts to keep him at school were unavailing; he was expelled from Westminster and from

Harrow, and when at the age of fourteen, a ward in Chancery, he appealed to Lord Eldon to increase his allowance of eight hundred pounds per annum, saying he was going to get married, that gentleman replied briefly: "Sir, if you cannot live on your allowance, you may starve, and if you marry I will commit you to prison." It would have spoiled a very pretty biography had Mytton not exercised every Englishman's right to go to hell his own way. With an iron constitution Mytton entered upon a career of dissipation which ended only with his death from delirium tremens in the King's Bench Prison in his thirty-seventh year. He had by that time succeeded in dissipating a fortune of £10,000 a year and £60,000 in ready money which had accumulated during his minority.

Now, I don't mean to say that the "Life of Mytton" is a work of art or

that it is my favorite biography, but I do say that if one wants to know in how many different ways a man can play the fool, it is essential to read this "Life" and while doing so to remember that a hundred years ago Jack Mytton, Esq., M. P. for Shrewsbury, actually lived such a life as is presented by his biographer. The "strenuous life" that Mr. Roosevelt preached was the life of a valetudinarian compared with it.

But what did he do? you ask. We may suppose that the high spots in the life of this young barbarian, born without a nervous system, but with muscles of steel, are those chosen for illustration by Alken, and opening the book at random we come upon a man in a nightshirt with a gun in his hand squatting on the ice waiting for a covey of ducks to appear. This was not done on a bet, but it appears that Mytton never felt either heat or cold,

and that far from getting himself up in proper sporting togs, as men usually do when they go out; he, whenever the humor took him, went out in whatever he happened to have on: now he happened to have on a night-shirt when he felt a desire to shoot birds.

Another picture, showing two men being thrown out of a cart into the road, illustrates this story: Mytton was driving a friend home when he chanced to ask his friend whether he had ever been hurt by being thrown out of a gig. "No, thank God," was his friend's reply, "for I never was upset in one." "What!" exclaimed Mytton, "never upset in a gig, what a damned slow fellow you must have been all your life," and immediately running his off wheel up a bank, out they both went. But the classical story, without which no reference to this book would be complete, is the

one illustrated by the plate bearing the title, "Damn this hiccup". The story may be briefly told. Mytton was in the act of getting into bed, when annoyed by the hiccups, he exclaimed, "Damn this hiccup, I'll frighten it away," and taking a lighted candle, applied it to his shirt tail and was instantly enveloped in flames. When he was finally got to bed he stayed there for a considerable time.

How much he ate and drank—from four to six bottles of port was his daily allowance; the treatment of his wives —he had two; and many other details of this remarkable man were set down not in sorrow, certainly not in anger, but in wonder by his biographer, and we are quite prepared—as he was not —for his end. Ruined in estate, body, and mind, he fled to France, where, port being unobtainable, he lived on brandy. After a time he returned to England where he was at once arrested

for debt, the amount of which no one seemed to know. In a few weeks he was dead, and his remains deposited in all honor in the family vault under the communion table of Halston Chapel. "After life's fitful fever he sleeps well." Let us hope so.

* * * * *

The illustration is made from a rare plate, which may be had in three states: the first, in mezzotint, printed in black, an almost unheard of rarity; the second, printed in colors, as shown is scarce enough but is to be had occasionally; and the third, printed in black when the plate was badly worn and colored by hand, to be avoided by all self-respecting collectors, although it would serve to lighten up a dark passage. The legend under the plate reads in part as follows:

JOHN MYTTON, ESQUIRE
HALSTON, SALOP

400